

Note

Genesis 12-24 – Part 1

Era	Characters	Chapters
In the beginning	God create world	Gen 1
Before 4000 BC	Adam Eve	Gen 1~5
Before 3000 BC	Cain Abel Seth	Gen 4~5
Before 2500 BC	Noah	Gen 5~10
About 1500 BC Era of Patriarchs	Abraham Isaac Ishmael Esau Jacob Joseph	Gen 11~50 ?

Summary

Genesis 12-24 – Part 1 of 1 3

Despite their imperfections, God chose the three patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, because of their faith – dependence on God’s promise. Reasons behind God’s selection of the Promised Land.

Lessons from Abraham’s life:

- (a) his covenant with God;
- (b) how he went through hardship despite this covenant;
- (c) how he worshipped God by building an altar;
- (d) how his sin of faithlessness led to Ishmael’s birth and the 4,000-year conflict between Ishmael and Isaac’s offspring
- (e) how his lack of persistence in prayer contributed to Sodom and Gomorrah’s destruction; and
- (f) his unwavering faith even when asked to sacrifice his son Isaac.

How Abraham giving Isaac as a sacrifice is a foreshadowing of Christ.

Transcript

Genesis 12-24 – Part 1 of 1

Today, we're going to start a study on The Patriarchs. And today's study is from Genesis 12 to 24.

What are the patriarchs? Patriarchs is just another word for fathers. The Israelites reckoned they had three patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The Book of Genesis, from chapters 12 to 50, covers four personalities, not three; there's an additional one, Joseph. So, with the three patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, in this part of the book, and then we have Joseph. Strictly speaking, Joseph does not qualify as a patriarch. God did not speak to him directly, as He did to the other three patriarchs. He only was led by God through dreams and interpretation of dreams. Now, in this way of studying, in this part of our study, we are going to look at the lives of these four men.

So, our focus now is changed. Earlier on in Genesis, we studied the universe, then the world, for thousands of years. Now, the spotlight is on one family, four generations of them. And, the way God is going to teach us truth is by telling us about their lives. So, as God tells us about their lives, we study their lives. We are using a method of study called the case study method. Now today, when you go to a top university, like Harvard, and you enroll in an MBA course there, you study case studies - case

study of a successful CEO, or case study of a company when a company does well or badly or case study of a country. So, we have found in the way of education, field of education, that case studies are a wonderful way to learn lots of layers of truth about something. You could study the case study in a very superficial way and see just some big truths. Then, as you study deeper, you see more truths. And then you can go very, very, very deep to study little fine very deep truths.

So, in other words, the same case study can be used by different students studying at different levels.

So, that's why the Bible is a book that:

people, who are new Christians,

could study these four lives and learn something,

or

people, who want to be scholars,

could study one aspect of Abraham's life and come to very deep truths.

So, at this point of our study, we're just going to look at some important truths in the lives of these four people.

Now, let's look at the time frame.

The patriarchs, like Abraham, lived in about 2000 BC. 2000 BC is the time when the great civilizations of the world came about: China, Indus Valley, India, Egypt. So, basically, after the Tower of Babel, they spread. They went to some rivers, where there was fertile land. And then, people started to build civilizations.

So, 2000 BC: Abraham. We call that the Age of the Patriarchs.

And, 1500 BC, we call it the Age of the Prophets; people like Samuel would come in at this time.

Then, 1000 BC is the Age of the Kings. For the sake of remembering the P's: Patriarchs, Prophets, instead of saying Kings we say Princes. The Princes, 1000 BC: King Saul, King David.

Then, we move on to the Priests, 500 BC. Because at 500 BC, Israel was in exile. There were no more kings left, no more princes left. So, the ones that the Israelites looked up to were the priests.

Then, we go to 0 BC, Christ comes.

So, there's a simple way to remember. If someone asks you,

“When did Abraham live?” 2000 BC.

“When did Samuel live?” 1500 BC.

“When did King David live?” 1000 BC.

“When did Elijah live?” 500 BC.

This gives you an easy way to remember, not very accurate but roughly.

Now, why did God choose these three patriarchs? Were they perfect men? Not at all. Abraham, lied twice, recorded anyway. Maybe, many, many, more times than the two recordings of him lying to the king about his wife, Sarah, saying, “She’s not my wife, she’s my sister.” And then, knowing when he lied, the king would take his wife to be a mistress. That's not a very good thing to do. Isaac, also lied, exactly like his father to save his skin, at the expense of his wife. And then, Jacob of course, is the worst of the lot. He deceived an almost blind father, to get more inheritance from his father. That's not a very good thing to do. But nonetheless, God chose them.

Now, you see, God has the right to choose. We call that the doctrine of election. Many people say, “Why does God choose this person? Why not choose this other person?” God has rights. Let me give you an example. For example, I, just as an ordinary human, I have rights. I go to a restaurant, I choose what I want to eat. Now often, people ask me, “Why do you like to eat that? It's not very nice.” I said, “I like it. It's my choice.” I go to a store, I buy a shirt and somebody would say, “Eww, so ugly.” I said, “I like it.” So, as a human, I have rights to choose what I like. Does not God have rights? So, that's the doctrine of election.

Now, these three men were not perfect men. But they had amazing faith. What is faith? Faith is not that optimistic personality that some people have. Some people seem to have

this belief that “Ah, it will work out. Don't worry.” They have faith that things would work out. That's not what it means. Faith here means faith in a promise given by God. For these three men, God had promised them that they would inherit a piece of land. Not themselves personally, but their descendants would, eventually, inherit a piece of land. They never owned a square foot of this land. Maybe Abraham had a little cave he bought for his wife, Sarah. That's all he owned of this land. But he knew this land would eventually be his and his family's. Why? Because God said so. That's all. So, faith is nothing about your personality. It's about depending on the promise of God.

So, when the word “faith” in the Bible is used, it simply means depending, trusting a promise of God. So, the Bible says, in Hebrews 11, which is the chapter on the heroes of the faith, these three men died in faith, never having seen the promise. Why did they believe it? Because God said so. Very much, like, for example, me. I know I'm going to have everlasting life. How do I know that? Do I know what everlasting life is? No, I have no idea what everlasting life is. It's too long, my brain cannot picture so many years. Can I believe that I'm going to exist in a new Heaven and new Earth? I have never seen this new Heaven, new Earth. But why do I believe it? God said so; that's good enough for me. So, faith is believing in a promise. That's all it is.

Now, why did God tell them they're going to this piece of land? What's so special about this piece of land? This piece of land, let's call it the Promised Land, is strategically located. If you go to Atlas, you will see, there are three continents - Asia, Africa, and Europe - somewhat joined together. And if you look at the hub of these three continents, you will see a piece of land, which is Israel today. It's like a hub, with three spokes: Asia, Africa, Europe. And so, if anybody wanted to go from Europe to Africa,

he would have to pass this strategic piece of land. If you wanted to go from Asia to Africa, you would have to pass through this land. It is like, you have to go through this place if you want to move from one continent to the other. At the time of Abraham, at the time of the patriarchs, Israel, in the Bible, the three populated continents were Asia, Africa and Europe. The Americas were very sparsely populated. Australia was very sparsely populated. So, these three continents contain the bulk of the population of the world. And so, if anyone wanted to travel from one place to another, this would be the strategic place. So, eventually, God's truth would come out from this place. And the best way to spread truth is to start with a strategic location, so, that truth, the Gospel, eventually could spread to Africa, Asia, Europe, and it did. So, this piece of land is strategically located, this Promised Land. Because God wanted this place to be a place where truth is given, where truth can be shared.

Now, if you look at Israel, it's a very tiny place. The present size of Israel is about 30 times the size of Singapore - and Singapore is so tiny. Not only is Israel tiny, but it is a very compact piece of land. They have snow-capped mountains. They have deserts. They have deep depressions, like the Dead Sea, one of the deepest depressions on earth. Snow-capped mountains and deep depressions. There are all kinds of climate, all kinds of vegetation. In fact, at the time of Abraham and the Bible times, they had all kinds of animals there. So, it was like a world in miniature. This is the Promised Land. And this is the stage at which we are going to see a lot of things taking place. This strategic little piece of real estate is, literally, the stage for most of the things you're going to read in the Bible.

Let's now come to the life of Abraham. Chapter 12, begins the life of Abraham. So, focus on one man now. Abraham was 75 years

old when God spoke to him. He lived, at that time, in the city of Ur. Ur is in Mesopotamia. Mesopotamia, the word “meso” means “between”, “potamia” means “the waters, the river”, so the word “hippopotamus” is an animal that lives in the water, the river. So, Mesopotamia is the land between the Tigris and Euphrates, two massive rivers, and very fertile land. If you've checked in Google, you'll find that Ur, at the time of Abraham, about 2000 BC, was a very sophisticated city. Amazing. There were brick buildings, nice houses, even running water, at that time. So, at the age of 75, living in this prime city of the world at that time, God says to Abraham, “Leave your city. Go to this land, that I'm going to show you, that you've never seen yet.” What? At 75? You call Abraham out, from this beautiful place? At this age? To go to a land he has never seen, to live in tents for the rest of his life? And yet, you know what Abraham did? He obeyed God. God said “Go”; he went. Now that is amazing.

And then immediately in Genesis 12:2, God says, “I will make you a great nation. I will bless you. And I will bless you to be a blessing to many other nations.” I hope you see the words, “I will” three times in Genesis 12 verses 2 and 3. And later on, God adds, “I will give you this land, this Promised Land.” This is what we call, in the Bible, a covenant. It is like a king, a very strong king, going to a smaller kingdom and telling the kingdom, “Hey, come into agreement with me. I will protect you. I will provide for you. And all you have to do is obey me.” So, that's what a covenant is. A covenant is an agreement between two parties - but not two equal parties - one superior party and one inferior party. Technically, a marriage, in almost all cultures in the world, are covenants; not two equals coming together, as what “modern” people think. Marriages, traditionally, have been a man taking a wife, a man saying to a lady, “I will provide for you, I will protect you. And the condition is, you will be my loyal wife. That is the condition.” So, you are going to see a covenant and you're going to see it many times. God makes a covenant with

Abraham. Then He makes a covenant with Isaac. He makes a covenant with Jacob. Basically, “I will be your God, you will be My people.” So, this is a covenant that God made with Abraham: “I will”. Like a marriage, man says, “I will, I will.”

Now, in a marriage, we have a token of a marriage. I wear a wedding ring. This reminds me, I am married. The token for God's covenant with Israel is circumcision; the skin of the flesh is cut off. And every time an Israelite boy stands up to urinate, he is reminded: he is in a covenant with God. He has to obey this God. So, this wedding ring reminds me, just like circumcision is the token of the covenant that Israelites had. It is very important to them.

And then, as we go on in Genesis chapter 12, shortly after this, Abraham builds an altar. What does it mean, to build an altar? It means, he sacrificed. You don't build an altar for nothing; you build an altar to sacrifice an animal. Abraham built an altar and the Bible tells us, three times, he built an altar and he sacrificed an animal. That was his way of worshipping God. He probably had learned it from Abel, the son of Adam. Almost every culture has an altar and a sacrifice. When I went to China, I went to the Temple of Heaven, a very interesting place. A lot of symbolism of the Bible there. The roof is three, number 3. And then there are a lot of number 12's around. And then there was a very significant altar, made of stone. And then, I asked the guide, “What is this?” He said, “This is where the Emperor would offer a bullock for the people.” The Emperor's job was not to make laws; the Emperor's number one job was to offer a sacrifice to the god of heaven so that the god of heaven would be pleased with China and bless China with good crops, etc. So, every culture has this, altar and sacrificing, all probably learned it from this ancient ancestor of ours called Abel.

Now, we see, another interesting thing, almost immediately after he makes a covenant with God, he built an altar to worship God, he encounters a famine. "I'm living nicely in Ur. There is no famine in Ur, because Ur is between two massive rivers that never dry up. And now, I come to this covenant with God, and I face a famine, no food to eat."

This is very important for us to understand. Because there's so much health and wealth "theology" being taught nowadays that tells us, "the moment you come into a relationship with God, everything will be well: you will have health and wealth." The Bible doesn't teach that.

The Bible now tells Abraham, "you're going to be through a famine." Wow. Do you know what they did whenever they had a famine in the Promised Land? They ran down to Egypt. Because Egypt is not rain-fed. Famine is usually caused by no rain. Egypt is river-fed, by the Nile. And the Nile never dries up. So, they'll always run down to Egypt.

And when Abraham runs down to Egypt, he realizes that he's got this pretty wife, Sarah - and she's so beautiful. It's a way of the Egyptians to recommend any beautiful girl to Pharaoh, to be taken into his harem, to become one of his concubines. And so, Abraham realizes that and says, "Hey, Sarah, tell them you're not my wife. If they know you're my wife, you know what Pharaoh's gonna do? He's gonna kill me and take you. So, just say, you're my sister. And that way, I will survive." But, "in that way", Sarah will end up in the harem of Pharaoh. So, Abraham wasn't that perfect man that we think he was. But, nonetheless, he had

something very special called, faith. He was willing to leave Ur, at 75, go to this place, live in a tent for the rest of his life, because he had faith in a promise of God. And God counts faith as something very important. To depend on God and trust God is the most important thing a human being can have.

So, we go on to look at the life of Abraham very quickly. We don't have to go through every story because this is not a PhD study, it's a case study. So, along the way, God promises Abraham and Sarah that they would have an offspring - a child, a son - to inherit that Promised Land. But after 10 years, no son came. And so, Sarah loses her patience and she tells Abraham, "I think God forgot about us. Go into my Egyptian slave, have relationships with her and get a son through her." Because, Abraham's faith had failed and Abraham failed, as a husband, to take a stand - just like Adam failed, as a husband, to take a stand - he obeyed his wife, so to speak, and he had sexual relationships with Hagar and that child, called Ishmael, was born.

Now, this is quite a significant event in world history up till today. Ishmael is the ancestor of the Arabs. When Ishmael was in his mother's belly, Hagar's belly, God said, "This child of yours will be a multitude, will be a great nation." That has come to pass. Today, the Arab nation is 400 million strong. That's a big family: 400,000,000, one of the biggest families in the world today. Interestingly enough, the prophecy of God on this child, in Genesis 16:12 says, "he will be a wild man." That's the King James translation, "wild man." But, in other translations, more accurately it says, "he will be a wild donkey of a man." Because, the word, in Hebrew, is actually, "he will be a wild donkey." Now, a wild donkey, in the time of Abraham, was an untamable animal. Nobody can tame a wild donkey. Horses? -easy, tamable; but not a wild donkey.

So, there were two prophecies:

- 1) “you'll be a huge nation” and
- 2) “you'll be a wild donkey of a man”.

And the prophecy goes on to say, “and his hand will be against every man and every man's hand against him.” In other words, he will always be at war. I think this prophecy, to my mind, is fulfilled: a massive nation of people, who always seem to have some conflict, one with another.

Let's look at how this sin of Abraham - sin of faithlessness, sin of listening to his wife when he should be telling his wife what is right - what it has caused for 4,000 years, 2000 BC till now 2000 AD. The offspring of Ishmael and the offspring of the half-brother Isaac had been fighting for 4,000 years. Hard to imagine a family feud lasting 4,000 years. That's a fact, up till today, the Arabs are trying to destroy the Israelites. So, you can see how one mistake can have very major, long term repercussions - especially mistakes of lack of faith.

Then, we go on to see another interesting story in his life, the story of Sodom. Abraham had a nephew called Lot and Lot decided to stay in the city of Sodom. Nice city, in a prosperous, fertile land, but it was a very wicked city. Today, we have the word “sodomy”; sodomy is male homosexuality. And the word comes from the city of Sodom. Sodom, was horrendously immoral. If you read Genesis 19, you cannot believe there is a city like this. When you bring a guest to your house, men come knocking on the doors saying, “Bring the man out, we're gonna have sex with him.” Even today, there's no city as wicked as Sodom. But can you imagine the wickedness? We think that

wickedness is something new, but it has always been around, since the Fall of Adam.

And, Abraham was told by God, that God was going to destroy the city. And Abraham said, “God, are You going to destroy this city of wicked people? There are good people in there. If there are 50 good people, how can You destroy it?” And God said, “50? I wouldn't destroy it.” Abraham considers to bargain, because his nephew and his nephew's family live there. And, Abraham bargains, “God, what about 45? Will You destroy 45 righteous men?” God said, “No, I won't.” And, he bargains down to 10. God is very patient. God says, “10 men? I wouldn't destroy it.”

Then the Bible says something very interesting; at the end of Genesis 19, it says, “God left, when Abraham stopped communing with God.” In other words, when Abraham said to God, “If there are 10 righteous men, please don't destroy the city.” And God said, “I won't.” Then Abraham stopped at that point, instead of asking for 5 righteous man. Maybe the city would have been spared, but Abraham stopped praying. Now, what lesson can we learn from this case study? You know, God is often far more merciful, far more patient than us. The problem with us is we lose our patience - our faith - very quickly. We pray and pray and when there's no result, you know what we do? We just stop. Actually, God is saying, “Why did you stop?” So, can I encourage you? When you pray for something you feel really led to pray for, just keep praying, don't quit. God doesn't answer immediately.

So, we see, in the city of Sodom, these awful things. And then, we see one highlight, so to speak. And I call it, the highlight, of

Abraham's life, that is found in Genesis chapter 22. Finally, Abraham has a son now. His son is growing up nicely. His son's name is Isaac, and is his only son, not counting Ishmael, his son from an illegitimate relationship. This is his only, real, precious son, whom he loves. And one day, God says to him, "Hey, Abraham, offer Isaac up for a burnt offering." Whoa! A burnt offering means, you put him on the altar, just like all the other animals, you put on the altar, in firewood and burn him as an offering to God. Now, Abraham obviously loves his son. And furthermore, Abraham knows the promise that God gave, of the land, has to go to his son. This is the only son. "If I kill this son and burn him, then, I'm destroying the promise of God." But the Bible tells us, God said, "Just go. Bring your son to Moriah. Bring your son to Mount Moriah and offer him there."

Now, the word "Moriah" may not be familiar to you, but Moriah, today, is called Calvary. It's called Golgotha. This is the same mountain where, 2,000 years later, the Lamb of God was crucified for us. So, God told Abraham, "Bring Isaac to Moriah and sacrifice him there." The amazing part in Genesis 22 says: Abraham woke up early that morning; he heard the order from God, "Go to Moriah and sacrifice your son." He woke up, early in the morning, to go. Wow, this man's faith is amazing! I can't believe that. Imagine, if God asked me to do that, I would try to delay it as long as possible, hoping God would change His mind. And then, it goes on to say, it was a three-day journey. He woke up early and for three days, he brought the firewood, he brought the knife, he brought Isaac, he brought a few of his servants, with a donkey carrying the firewood, to go to this mountain. For three days, he did it. Three days - there's so many chances to change your mind, but he didn't. Can you imagine what went through his mind? A thousand horrible thoughts, but one thing sustained him. God said, "I will give you a land. To you and your descendants." "But, this is my descendant. Even if I kill him, maybe God's gonna do something. I don't know what it is." He had never heard of

resurrection yet. Anyway, the story goes on to say, finally, he reaches Mount Moriah, builds the altar, puts the firewood and then he straps Isaac down on the altar, ready to kill him and then burn him.

Wow! Some things crossed my mind. Why did Isaac not protest?
Some

people say, "Maybe he was a little boy, he couldn't struggle with his father?"

I tell you, even if he was a 5-year old boy, he is gonna yell and scream – yet, no mention of that. Many people like to believe that Isaac was a boy, like 12 years old at the most. But the Jews believe that Isaac was an adult. And they come to that conclusion, from the next chapter, Genesis 23. Moriah, this story, is from Genesis 22. Genesis 23, immediately the first verse says, "and Sarah was 127 years old, and she died." Now, if Sarah is 127, then Isaac is 37 years old. Because Isaac was born when Sarah was 90. The Jews believe he was 30+ years old, when he was brought up to Moriah. Whatever it is, whether he's 12 years old or 30 years old or 37 years old, it doesn't matter. Why was he just lying there? I am still puzzled.

But anyway, as Abraham was about to stab Isaac and offer him to sacrifice to God, kill him first then burn him, he hears a voice: "Abraham!" Then, he turns around and the voice says to him, "Don't touch Isaac, don't kill him! God has provided, a ram, for the sacrifice." Abraham turns around and he looks, and he sees - in the thicket, thorny bush - a ram, caught by his horns, in the thorns and he cannot escape. Wow! Abraham's so thankful. God has provided a ram. And he freed up Isaac, put the ram on the altar and offered that sacrifice of a ram, a substitute for Isaac. And then he called the name of that place, Jehovah-jireh, which

means, God will provide. We always hear the term, Jehovah-jireh, God will provide. Do you realize it came from this occasion, where God provided the most important thing of all, His only begotten Son, to be our Lamb - or ram - for our sacrifice?

So, can you see here, a type of the Gospel? To me, it's perfect type. Wow! Like God the Father giving His only beloved Son, Abraham gives Isaac. God the Father gives Jesus, His only beloved Son - Jesus on the Cross, no protest. Unbelievable. And then, Jesus on the Cross, a crown of thorns. Why the crown of thorns? Because, there was a ram, caught, in the thorns, by his horns. He was stuck in the thorns. Can you see the picture? And that ram, substituted, for Isaac. So many hints of the Event 2,000 years later.

Now, there are several questions probably on your mind. How did Abraham have such faith? Is it natural to have such faith? Maybe, he had more faith than others? But I believe, Abraham, was, already, somewhat prepared by God. Abraham was 100 years old and Sarah was 90 when they had a child. Now, obviously, at that time, Abraham was way past having a child. Sarah was definitely beyond childbearing age. And yet, when God told them, "I will give you a child." They were miraculously provided, with a life. "Where did this child come from? Not from me, not from Sarah. We both are not capable of producing a child, but God gave a life."

So, I think, when he went up to Moriah, he already knew this God. He had an idea of who this God was. "This God is amazing, He can give life. And if I stab my son, Isaac, I don't know what He will do. But He can give life, because Isaac had to inherit the Promised Land." So, he couldn't figure it out. But he knew, God

can do things he can't figure out. That is, I think, the way God prepared him. And maybe, he had told this story to Isaac, about how Isaac was born, when he was 100 and his mama was 90. He said, "Isaac, you're not from us. You're a gift from God. God does amazing things. We must trust this God."

To know God, is the most important thing, and I believe, Abraham and Isaac knew God. Because, they had this understanding of God.

That's why we're studying this beautiful Book, not so much to see what promises I can get, but Who God is. And, when we know Who our God is, our life will never be the same. We'll not be shaken, we'll not be troubled, not by events, because our life is anchored on Who God is.

So, I hope this study, a very quick study of Abraham's life, will give us beautiful seed truths of Who this God is and what He will yet do for us at Calvary.